

Children's Toys and Games during the Shoah, as Reflected in Five Hebrew Books

Nitsa Dori

Correspondence: Dr. Nitsa Dori, Head of the Department of Early Childhood, Shaanan Academic College, Haifa, Israel & Eliyahu HaGiladi 8, Netanya, Israel.

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Abstract

The article will discuss games and toys connected to transmitting the legacy of the Shoah, as reflected in five Hebrew stories: *Hadubi shel Fred* [Bear and Fred: A World War II Story] by Iris Argaman, *Grandpa's Third Drawer: Unlocking Holocaust Memories* by Judy Tal Kopelman, *Bubah me'erets aheret* [A Doll from Another Country] by Ofra Galbert Avni, *Hasodot shel savtah* [Grandma's secrets] by Ayana Friedman-Wirtheim, and *Kaleidoscope* by Hava Nissimov. The article will depict the toys found in the books as exhibits for transmitting the legacy of the Shoah, as visual symbols that are also sociocultural objects, as a means of survival for children during the Shoah period, and as relators of a narrative that is passed on from one generation to the next. The article will also discuss the illustrations that accompany the text as contributors to their visual symbolic language.

Keywords: toys, the Shoah legacy, Hebrew literature, World War II, visual symbols, children

1. Introduction

Respect your personal belongings/ Belongings have a long memory/ Warmth, suffering, and tenderness/ Cling to them ceaselessly/ They won't allow you to recover/ They won't allow you to run away/ You can always come back to feel them/ Belongings have power. (Lyrics to the song, "Personal Belongings", Naomi Shemer)

Naomi Shemer, a famous Israeli songwriter (1951-2004), uses her song to ask for respect for belongings because they have power. Every time we touch – whether one person touching another, a person touching an object, or a person touching something inanimate – the incident is etched as an essential part of the general fabric of people's lives – whether it is pleasant or unpleasant (Bar, 2016). The general fabric is a person's general culture on the personal plane and the general plane. Culture is first and foremost an expression of each person's landscape, climate, needs, and lifestyle.

In today's material culture, when every worn-out or old object is thrown into the garbage, and another, newer one, takes its place, this article will emphasize the sentimental value of old objects, those that carry a baggage of memories and childhood experiences from the Second World War.

The various toys and games, that reflect the child's personal crisis when separating from them, also reflect entire lives of families during the Shoah (Note 1), that imparted the toy with meaning and turned it into a memory. The object or game, given to the child at the beginning of the Second World War, turned into an item that causes a flood of memories. Some objects arouse a personal memory, and some a historic collective one. Every object, toy, or game, that survived the Shoah, carries its baggage of memory and history. Every object journeyed from the place from which it was uprooted to its new home. One of the devices children's literature uses to gently and non-threateningly bring the child receiver closer to the events of the Shoah, is through the description of an intergenerational encounter between a grandfather/ grandmother and their grandchild, surrounding the object that is passed down from one generation to the next. Several literary researchers have already written about the importance of this encounter in children's Shoah literature (Darr, 2005; Sacerdoti, 2015; Shinar, 1999).

1.1 Research Goal

The research goal is to examine how Hebrew children's literature presents the Shoah to the third generation – the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of the survivors – as a factor in establishing cultural memory. It contributes to education in building significance following the reading of Shoah memorial literature, by creating mutual discourse

between the generation of survivors and the generation of their grandchildren and great-grandchildren. It also provides an opportunity for teaching about the Shoah in a softer, and non-traumatic manner.

The purpose of the article is to examine how the value of these toys is expressed in the eyes of the adult figure who gives it and the child who receives it, the mutual relationship between adult and child and the attitude to the toys themselves in the five children's books in Hebrew, while studying the written and illustrated text.

2. Literature Review

Children's books occupy a central position in the socialization process, and their potential influence on young children, when age limits their decoding and ideological opposition abilities, requires discussion (Galda & Short, 1993; Messaris, 1994). An illustrated, written book is read in two languages – verbal and visual. Each of them has different presentation qualities and components. Despite the differences between the languages, they have a similar aim – both express an idea using various means of presentation (Hunt, 2005; Nikolajeva & Scott, 2000). When children's literature uses two languages simultaneously, it intensifies the representation of false reality as if it was a faithful rendering of reality. Therefore, children's literature fulfills an important role as an agent of socialization in structuring and reproducing the reality, through which the identity of the society in which it was created, its dilemmas and main narratives, can be examined.

2.1 *The Game as a Narrative*

In her article, Sacerdoti (2015) reviews 15 children's books about the Shoah, written over the past 22 years and targeted at ages 4-8, and lists the arguments of those opposed to reading these books to young children. It would seem that stories focused on an object that belongs to a child – a toy or game – can transmit relatively soft and gentle messages while still describing a difficult period and the personal crisis for the child in the story experiencing them. Through these stories, the child will learn about the suffering of a child his age during the Shoah period (Regev, 2000), the personal struggle accompanied by the wish to survive (Zahavi, 1981), and the ability to overcome despair in terrible times (Cohen, 1989). There are narratives behind every object, in both reality and a children's story. Narratives and stories are first and foremost language structures. Studies prove that story-telling ability already exists in children aged two and a half (Dvash, 2011). It serves their need to make order of the world around them, help them understand it, and give it meaning. No one denies the power of language to shape imagination. It allows us to tell stories that make use of objects around us, and extract different explanations from them. But the question can be asked: Which stories do objects tell us? The Museum of the Jewish People at Beit Hatfutsot serves as an example of a museum that tells a story. The story serves as a mythical framework that weaves the historical facts into a plot and imparts them with significance. It is, in essence, a super-narrative that imparts the exhibits with mythical-historical character. The myth is based on a story that a society relates about itself to itself and to others. The story is the first and important component. Simple objects are silent witnesses that commemorate entire life stories (Finkler, 2014). Because of the special circumstances of the Shoah, the significance of those personal objects-toys during the Shoah period intensified beyond their personal-psychological and historical value, since they are considered witnesses for future generations, silently relating slices of life that are no more and fragments of memories that wish to be preserved, and thus can illuminate unique corners of humanity. The toys and games were the children's sole place of escape, particularly during that period, from the prevailing and bitter reality they were subject to during the Shoah era. When playing, the children would essentially cut themselves off from the world of reality for a few minutes, and enter their own imaginary world. Those who remained and succeeded in surviving the Shoah moved to Israel together with their memories, and some came with the toys and games they had made, created, or received during those times. These were toys and games from which they were unable to part, and they formed a very significant part of their saved lives.

2.2 *The Game as a Transitional Object*

A transitional object is also known as a comfort object. Many parents know this is an object to which the infant is attached, that offers him comfort, encouragement, calm, and tranquility. Every parent knows what happens when the transitional object that their child is so attached to gets lost, and widespread psychological interpretation says that the transitional object enables the child to maintain the fantasy of constant contact with the main figures in his life – his parents – during the time that he is slowly learning to be separate from them. However, the psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott (1958) had a slightly different interpretation regarding the meaning of the transitional object. According to Winnicott, a person is born aware only of his subjective reality, while the adult lives in two parallel realities – his subjective reality and the external objective reality. In Winnicott's view, the transitional object is such that it bridges between the objective and subjective realities precisely during the period in which the infant discovers the objective reality and learns that there are social demands, norms, and laws.

The infant's transitional object – such as the blanket, pacifier, doll, or car – has an objective-real element that brings the infant to cling specifically to this object and not another one of the same type (it must be this teddy bear and not another

one), while the object also has a subjective significance that provides the child with a solution for calming down, comfort, and even expressing internal urges. What it is that makes the item subjective is the unique significance which the child imparts to the item, something no one else can understand. In other words, the infant must create the transitional object, choose it, and “load” it with emotions, desires, and wishes.

The transitional object is both reality and imagination, enabling both pleasure and play but also comfort and something to cling to during times of lack of control, and these important implementations turn it into an almost inseparable stage in every child’s development. The transitional object, argued Winnicott, enables the infant to create for himself a potential space that is both real and imaginary at any one time. According to his approach, the game itself is the therapy. During the Shoah period, the toys were a kind of “transitional object” that helped children overcome situations of separation from a familiar family member.

2.3 The Game as a Therapeutic Factor in Reality and Children’s Literature

Smilansky & Shefatya (1993) explain that for very young children, sociodramatic play is a great teacher, and is characterized by concentration, joy, intensity, and using a stream of expression. Piaget (1962) distinguished between types of play that are play stages, experiential or practice games, make-believe games or symbolic play, and games characterized by rules. He viewed symbolic play as one of the most important expressions of the child’s symbolic thinking and development. Play has especial importance during early childhood and childhood when children play games involving role play (Harris, 2000). Various studies emphasized the contribution of play in the emotional field to development of intrapersonal communication and empathy (Schiller, 2010), in the social field to strengthening social intelligence (Goleman, 2006), in the motor skills field to refining coordination and movement (Karbach & Schubert, 2013), and in the cognitive field (Shonkoff & Levitt, 2010). Additional studies supported the link between play therapy and improving various functional aspects. Ray, Blanco, Sullivan, and Holliman (2009) for example, found moderate reduction in the aggressive behavior of children with behavior disorders following play therapy. The toy or game during the Shoah, held onto by the Jewish child, created a sense of identity and belonging with their private history, without the national element (Ron, 1993). A toy or game in a children’s book serve as a therapeutic tool for comfort and healing, a kind of rectification using speech and getting the child to speak (Darr, 2005; Milner, 2008). Educators are aware of the therapeutic value of role play with dolls, and recognize its value for indirect emotional release (Yehezkeili, 1988). It is assumed that every child identifies with the types of dolls and their actions and deeds. It is also assumed that every child projects his feelings, wishes, desires, and expectations into the sociodramatic play with the dolls (Waltman, 1979). In his book, *The rules of life*, Janusz Korczak (1930) already noted these things many years before modern day researchers. He writes that it is wrong for adults to think that there are games or toys which are too childish for a child of a particular age or to shame older children for playing imaginative games. Rather, the level is determined by what the child thinks and feels while playing, meaning whether they employ their imagination, thought, or interest, or play foolishly.

For many years, most Shoah survivors were unaware of the full nationalist value of the object they owned (Finkler, 2014): a comb, newspaper cutting, a doll, a sketch or sewing kit, that served them as sociodramatic play during harsh times. For them, the objects were part of their way of preserving memories of their murdered family members, or destroyed community. Only a small number of survivors turned to Yad Vashem and asked to donate the objects they owned, so as to place them in a protected place where they would tell the story of the Holocaust to coming generations. Learning about these objects and using them as a visual text, creates a connection to understanding the period – since these objects, the images appearing in them, and their traits, are part of the culture of the Jews of their times.

It should be noted that for some of the survivors, dealing with toys flooded an internal gap, toys, that are sometimes erroneously considered luxuries, linked in our minds with a happy childhood, joy, and leisure time, do not fit in with the Shoah narrative. Many child survivors were ashamed of the gap between their personal story and the general narrative, and their memories that included toys and games only increased their shame and guilty conscience. It often marks the inability to contain the complexity in the stories of children who lived in hiding, sometimes with pleasant living conditions, seemingly “outside” the event, alongside the fact that they were among the worst Holocaust victims. The topic of toys during the Shoah gradually ceased to be taboo among the survivors, and the more material – objects and memories – that was accrued, the more there was legitimacy, and more and more toys, pictures, and memories of toys and games began to stream into Yad Vashem for documentation.

It also emerged that all the children played during the Shoah period. In every environment, hiding place, and situation. Whether the toys and games were “formal” or whether they were makeshift from any object or material, even mud. For example, one of the survivors related that at first, she had her dolls. When they took her dolls away, she played with hairpins as if they were dolls. When she no longer had hairpins, she drew faces on her fingers, and when she no longer had anything to draw with, she played in her head, in her imagination. In some cases, toys and games played an even more important role than food. The toy’s survival trait worked on different levels.

However, other testimonies exist, such as that of Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau (Gold, 2011):

I didn't have toys. There simply was no time for such things. Even the children who brought toys with them from home had no time to play with them. Our day in the ghetto was totally full. I worked in the glass factory. People worked incredibly hard in dreadful heat, and my role was to help them cool down. I would drag a wooden cart with around 60 glass bottles. I would go outside into the freezing Polish cold, fill the bottles with water, return inside to the terrible heat in the factory and distribute water to the workers. I would do this for 12 hours without a break.

But the testimonies to toys and games existing in extreme and cruel situations like the Shoah teach us not about the conditions in which the children lived, but about the importance of toys and games and their being an inseparable and inevitable part of a child's environment. It would seem that a toy, unlike food and water, is not an essential need, but in contrast to what people usually think, the need for a game or toy is not far behind. In the cruel atmosphere of the Shoah, toys and games continued to exist even after other cultural behaviors and consumer objects had already disappeared.

The children during the Holocaust period spent their entire day in the ghetto in terrible conditions, some alone and some with their siblings and families, and to make them feel better, their parents tried to bring their children various toys that they made for them, or the children themselves would make or invent various sociodramatic games to make the time pass pleasantly and keep quiet in the ghetto or their hideouts, so that the Nazis would not find them, and to relieve their fears and apprehension. The most common toy game during the Shoah period was the doll or teddy bear, usually made out of wood, paper, fabric, or wool.

According to Cooper-Caesari (2009), dolls are a powerful tool for projection ("it isn't me, it was the doll") – the doll is not part of the body of the child or therapist. Working with dolls is the most far-reaching tool of all therapeutic methods in the field of dramatic arts. In such a situation, children's behaviors and coping methods can be expressed free from many inhibitions and camouflage, just because of the ability to project onto an object. The greater the distance between the child himself and the object of projection (for example, a stuffed animal), the easier it is for the child to process significant and deep emotional content in a way that is protected and safe. Internal-external connection – the dolls bridge between the children's inner world to the external world and the events taking place there. Emotional free expression – using the doll, children can give free, legitimate expression to their emotions without feeling guilt and fear. Emotional ventilation – the doll can provide emotional ventilation to say true things that would be unacceptable without the doll, since "the doll can say everything". Power of being needed – the doll "needs me" to infuse life into her. I am necessary for her. Using the doll enlists coping powers and resources, and thereby can particularly help children with difficulties and troubles, or tendencies to depression, from the very fact that they "bring to life" the doll when they use her. Freedom from human limitations – the rules that apply to human beings do not apply to the doll, allowing her to die and come back to life, to fly, to shrink, to grow, etc. Thereby the feelings, aspirations, and deepest fears of both children and adults can be seen visually. A doll who is a friend is the tool through which identity is created. This is a doll with a representative typical figure, with fixed and consistent features, a doll exclusive to the child who plays with it. Each doll represents an internal figure or internal voice, thus externalization of these voices and their representation by dolls enables children to create interaction between the different voices within them. This idea is based on Landy's (1993) taxonomy of roles.

3. Method

The article discusses games and toys handed down from one generation to the next, as reflected in the stories: *Hadubi shel Fred* [Bear and Fred: A World War II Story] by Iris Argaman, *Grandpa's Third Drawer: Unlocking Holocaust Memories* by Judy Tal Kopelman, *Bubah me'erets aheret* [A Doll from Another Country] by Ofra Galbert Avni, *Hasodot shel savtah* [Grandma's secrets] by Ayana Friedman-Wirtheim, and *Kaleidoscope* by Hava Nissimov. The article depicts the toys found in the books as exhibits for transmitting the legacy of the Shoah, as visual symbols that are also sociocultural objects, and as relators of a narrative. The article also discusses the illustrations that accompany the text as contributors to their visual symbolic language, and as reinforcing them, in particular regarding imparting significance to the game. It is important to note that to understand the verbal language, we must understand its parts and join them into a continuum with significance – using induction; whereas for illustration, the process is reversed – we must understand the whole and then we can understand the potential relationship of its parts – by deduction (Nodelman, 2005).

Almost all the stories include a child "from there", the adult when he was a child, who was holding the toy, game, or other childhood object, that would help him cope with the events of the Shoah, and the child "from here", the child in the story who receives the toy or game that accompanied the adult during the Shoah, and experiences through the toy or game or other childhood objects of memory, the survivor's and object's experience of survival, or that of the child receiver.

4. Findings and Discussion

In his book, *The rules of life*, educator, doctor, writer, philosopher, and intellectual, Janusz Korczak, notes that the most important thing is not what a child plays with, but rather his thoughts and feelings during play. Every toy or game introduced in these children's books has a human story hiding behind it. The stories open a window to the world of the children during the Shoah period, tell their personal stories, and allow us a glimpse inside the lives of the children during that time. Approximately a million and a half of the six million Jews murdered during the Shoah were children. Only several thousands were saved. (Note 2) Dolls and teddy bears were an inseparable part of the lives and world of the children to whom they belonged. In many cases they stayed with the children throughout the war, and were a source of encouragement and comfort. For some of the children, the dolls and stuffed bears are the most significant objects they have left from this period. Yagar (1961) writes about the poetics of the Shoah fiction for young children:

Sometimes the child learns about the Shoah or hears about the Shoah, and he learns nicely-described historical facts – but it has no effect... and sometimes he learns an artistic story... and it impresses him... making a real impression, he identifies and lives what is described in the work. (p.54)

The books discussed hereinafter tell the first-hand story of children and their toys, Shoah survivors, who wanted to continue living despite everything, and describe their attempts to create for themselves a different reality from that surrounding them. In all the stories, both the sender and receiver are in a safe place, and therefore they do not arouse fear or concern among the young listeners, and for all of them there is a “happy end” as usual in children's literature. The stories, focused on a game or toy that also survived the difficult period, try to create a true impression in the mind of the child listener. In many cases, it was children, the story's heroes, who infused their parents' hearts with hope and gave them the courage to continue with their daily struggle for their lives, and this also embodies an important true message: that one must not give up, even in difficult cases of despair. The hope and optimism emphasized in each of the stories is based on family norms and values, and the intergenerational relationship – parent-child, grandparent-grandchild – is particularly evident. The stories of families in the books illustrate the good heartedness embodied in the characters within the home and family, unlike the wickedness outside. Sacerdoti (2015) emphasizes this kernel of real impressions and the “use of materials from the child's familiar environment” (toys and games in the books discussed here):

The realistic story occupies an important place in Shoah literature for children, since it fulfills important roles in transmitting the historical events and creating a collective memory from an early age: anchoring the stories in historical reality, drawing the receiver into the historical event and using materials from his familiar environment. (p. 108)

The story *Hadubi shel Fred* [Bear and Fred: A World War II Story] by Iris Argaman (2016, Hakibbutz Hameuchad; illustrated by Avi Ofer), (Note 3) tells the true story of the boy, Fred Lessing, as told by his teddy bear:

I was afraid Fred would forget me, but he gathered up his hat, his gloves
His notebook and colored pencils, and he also stuffed me into his backpack
I was happy, even though I was squashed inside
It was dark and uncomfortable inside the backpack
But I didn't notice, because I was afraid. (p.30)

During the Second World War, Fred's parents in Holland had to hide him with different families. Fred took with him his little bear and “blankie” – created by his parents who sewed it for him from various materials, and which was his source of comfort and outlet for missing his family. At the end of the war, Fred and Bear move to live in America, but decades later (1996), Fred's Bear leaves Fred in Michigan, and goes on a new journey to Jerusalem. There he was exhibited in the “No Child's Play” exhibition at Yad Vashem, and was dubbed, “Yad Vashem's Mona Lisa”. Bear is a little, old teddy bear with matted fur, his eyes sewn with red thread. He is thin, faded, and dirty, but symbolizes all the children's toys that survived the Shoah, and the million and a half children murdered then. For Fred, Bear was a transitional object between a normal, warm, and family-oriented world, and a crazy, cold, and alienated one, and helped him overcome his sense of isolation, fear, and crisis that frequently occurred during the transitions between the families who provided him with a roof over his head and a hiding place during the Shoah:

Every night Fred would whisper that he misses his father, mother and brothers, that he's sad to be alone, that the world is scary and that he's lucky that I'm his best friend. Fred whispered those things, and while talking to me he stroked his face with my paw. Sometimes Fred shed small and warm tears and I wiped them away. (p. 32)

Bear arouses feelings of compassion, love, and hope for a better future within the boy, and the teddy bear's sadness is an anthropomorphism of the child's feelings. At the war's conclusion, the family reunited and immigrated to the USA,

together with Fred, and Bear, symbolizing the unending combination of Shoah and emigration, the bedrock of the State of Israel.

During his journey to Israel from the United States, Fred's Bear was shut inside a box. It was dark and cold. Bear did not like closed, dark places similar to during the war when he had been closed in Fred's backpack and "it was squashed [...] dark and uncomfortable" (Argaman, 2016, p. 27). Only once the war ended did he and Fred go out to the forest and the fields, they sat on a high branch and listened to the birds' singing. Bear loved to sit on the branch, "to see the sun play with the leaves and look at the horizon" (p. 36). He looked at the scenery, but was not part of it. Only after he arrived in Jerusalem did the "light" really touch him:

There's a burst of light./ The golden sun sends its long rays/ to caress my fur./ Now I feel nice and warm [...] a kind woman gathers me up in her arms/ and hugs me [...] The kind woman whispers to me:/ "Hello, Fred's Bear/ Welcome to Jerusalem./ You are finally here! (Prologue).

The intimate and direct relationship between Bear and the world and someone who is not Fred, occurs decades after the war's end, and only once he arrives in Jerusalem. However, Fred, the boy who has grown up, has grown older and become a father and grandfather, emigrated to the United States, and not to the Land of Israel, but when Bear immigrates to Israel he brings Fred with him too, because the connection between the two, as the teddy testifies, "is a close and special connection [...] as if we were one person. And perhaps even... we are one person. We always were" (p. 41).

Fred's Bear expresses, in the deepest possible way, the essence of the world of children during the Shoah, who held onto a game or toy so they would not lose their memories. The memory the object related and that could be an alternative to the family that once was and had been lost. Children's missing and lost objects during the Shoah symbolized everything that had been lost. Holding onto those objects and the meaning they carried for the uprooted children symbolized the memory connected with them. The objects themselves were the memory. Fred's Bear had not only an appearance. It also had a flavor, a smell, and a voice from the past, that even if they are not mentioned in the story, we, as receivers, choose to create them *ex nihilo* and revive them from the destruction. The eyes sewn with red thread are the recognizable feature of Bear, and serve as a type of number tattooed on its arm.

The transition of Fred's bear from Europe to America and from there to Jerusalem leave traces of his existence in every move and settling in from one place to another, and in each place he must adapt to new adoptive parents. Is he a dead, lifeless bear who incorporates death within him? Or maybe he continues living within us, the people who visit the Yad Vashem museum? The book leaves the question hanging in the air, and expects the receiver to supply his own answer.



Figure 1. Fred's Bear as featured in the Yad Vashem exhibition

In the story, *Grandpa's Third Drawer: Unlocking Holocaust Memories*, written and illustrated by Judy Tal Kopelman (Jewish Publication Society, 2014) (Note 4), the story begins on an optimistic and calm note:

"Of all the places in the world, I love to stay at Grandma Genia and Grandpa Yuda's house."

Later we become aware of the fact that the grandparents are Shoah survivors but, what they believe to be their terrible secret, is hidden from the child, since they want to give him a warm, loving home that is pleasant to come back to, and not a house full of horrific things and trauma. And where do they hide their secret? Grandpa's study has a desk with three drawers. The first drawer has "his pens and paper. My pencil case and favorite crayons are also there." The first drawer symbolizes the creativity and renewal after the events of the Shoah. It contains both writing implements, which Grandpa can use to record his memories, but it also contains the grandson's crayons, that color the dark gloom, if it exists in a different drawer, with bright colors. Grandpa's writing instruments and the child's crayons lie side by side harmoniously uniting two entirely different periods in the Jewish and Israeli experience. The second drawer has childhood photographs and "all sorts of special old toys that are made of wood or metal" that his neighbors in Germany kept for him until the war was over. The emphasis on the material from which the toys are manufactured comes to stress the difference between "old fashioned" toys made from authentic materials, closer to nature in their essence, to "today's" toys usually made of plastic and non-natural materials. The fact that "old fashioned" toys last is primarily due to the natural materials from which they are made. The absurdity hiding in this description is that the wooden and metal toys survived the Second World War, but many human beings did not. The third drawer is locked, and Grandpa does not

allow anyone to open it. This prohibition by Grandpa has a psychological explanation: “Adults admit that they find it hard to bear the children’s sorrow and fear. They prefer to protect their children from depressive aspects of life, instead of helping them acquire their own coping tools” (Lahad & Ayalon, 1995, pp. 57-58).

The story later describes breakfast at Grandpa and Grandma’s house – beautiful utensils, hand-embroidered tablecloths, and a romantic, tranquil atmosphere: “Sometimes a ray of light slips in, and you can see thousands of dust particles floating in midair.”

Illustrations of china teapots, roses in a vase, and a lace doily, add to the pleasant atmosphere in Grandpa and Grandma’s home during breakfast. Iconography uses symbols and images to relate to the artwork and the story it relates, and interprets them to impart them with significance. The two approaches are complementary and together enable a total analysis of all components of the artwork (Panofsky, 1982).

From a culinary aspect, too, the boy, Uri, experiences sweet tastes, “Grandma says that chocolate needs to be freshly made out of pure ingredients, using a recipe passed on from generation to generation.” This sentence hints, that beyond a recipe that should be transmitted from one generation to the next, the great secret (including the object or objects) will be passed from generation to generation in another few pages – the secret of the family tragedy, that will tear a hole in the tranquil atmosphere present in the initial pages of the story.

One day Uri opens the third drawer when Grandpa and Grandpa are not home, and finds prisoner’s clothing and a yellow star. Grandpa returns home and gets angry at Uri, who bursts into tears and wants to go home. If up until now, he had preferred being at Grandpa and Grandma’s house, now Uri wants to run away from there. Grandpa is sorry he became angry, hugs him, and tells him the story of the Shoah as his family experienced it, and shows him the rag doll that survived the war period that belonged to his sister, Anna. The illustrations become real: a combination of real pictures of a prisoner’s uniform, an old-fashioned doll, ghetto stamps, a yellow star, a photograph of dominos that Grandpa made from a piece of wood he found in the street and marked with red dots, and a small notebook with a wooden cover in which Anna wrote in the ghetto. The photographs have a physical presence that preserves the memory of the past, not in universal dimensions, but in family dimensions, that are easier for Uri to understand.

Grandpa relates that after the end of the war, he never saw Anna or his parents again. Grandpa cries, and this is the first time Uri has seen him cry. There is symbiosis of the crying between the grandfather and grandson: the grandson cries and the grandfather soothes him, the grandfather cries and the grandson comforts him. Now that the secret has been revealed, Grandpa and Uri play with the domino set from long ago. The shared game of the “old-fashioned” dominos unites the grandfather and grandson again and strengthens the intergenerational connection. “I never knew what he’d been through. Now, I love him even more,” says Uri at the end of the book. The story does not describe the grandfather physically giving one of the objects to Uri, but we can feel and understand that when Grandpa was driven out of his home in Germany because of the war, Uri relates “his neighbors kept his toy box for him until the war was over” (Kopleman, 2014, p. 3). When the Germans emptied the apartment that belonged to Lulu and her parents, one of the neighbors found a toy monkey and also a doll that were Lulu’s in the stairwell, that the German porters had dropped. He kept them until the end of the war, and returned them to the family with great emotion.

When we touch an inanimate object, and not a person, it is filled with emotional significance that is far broader than its dictionary significance. In the “grandmotherly Shoah literature” the object being touched is metonymic to the image, to the memories, and to the emotional reserves. After the third drawer is opened, Grandpa Yuda allows Uri to touch the doll that belonged to Anna, his little sister, who was killed in the Shoah. For Uri – the grandson – touching the doll is touching his grandfather’s past and the depths of his suffering and sorrow, and this makes him a partner in the experiences of the past. For Grandpa Yuda, Anna’s doll is the catalyzer through which the dam of silence is breached. The doll is taken out of its hiding place, from the delineated past, and brought into daylight, into the safe and protected reality of the “here and now”. This is an exposure that provides both the grandfather and grandson with security in the continuation of the family and the existence of a generation that will remember and remind (Sacerodti, 2015).

In the story, *Bubah me’erets aheret* [A Doll from Another Country] by Ofra Galbert Avni (Illustrations: Cristina Kadmon, Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2017), Noga’s preschool teacher asks the children to bring a toy they love from home. Every child brings a modern toy (a teddy bear, robot, Barbie doll, a radio-controlled jeep), but Noga brings an ugly raggedy doll: “A strange baby doll. The doll’s body was made of stuffed material, and its head, hands, and feet were from hard, peeling plastic. Its hair was from faded wool. It was dressed in an old dress” (p. 5).

All the children make fun of Noga because of the doll she brought, and Noga gets insulted, and cries because of their behavior. During circle time, Noga explains that this was Grandmother Esther’s doll when she was little, and it is a special doll because it is very old. The next day the preschool teacher surprises Noga and the preschoolers and invites Grandmother Esther to the preschool, to tell the story of the doll. Grandmother Esther relates that when she was a little girl in Morocco, she had Monique Dolly. Her parents sent Esther as a girl to the Land of Israel and promised they would

follow her. Esther waited for a long time and missed them very much. When her parents arrived after a long time – it had been difficult for them to come to Israel because of hardships imposed on them – Esther did not want to speak to them at first because she was angry with them. But when they took out Monique Dolly, Esther hugged both her doll and her parents and forgave them. Grandmother Esther tells the preschoolers that when Noga was five, she had given her Monique Dolly as a gift. Now Noga is respected by the children in the preschool: “Shaked approached Noga and said to her: I thought you brought some old doll, but Monique Dolly is special... ‘Let’s play mommies and daddies,’ suggested Stav, and Monique will be our baby” (p.23).

The illustrations in the book are slightly hazy, to increase the sense of blurring between past and present. In one of the pictures, Grandmother Esther is sitting on a chair in the garden, holding the doll in one hand and telling her story, with her other hand on Noga’s head. Noga hugs her grandmother and the illustration illustrates better than anything else, the connection between grandmother and granddaughter, using the connecting object – the doll that has passed from one generation to the next. The doll in the story has a therapeutic aspect. The immigrants-refugees could not always take their precious personal possessions with them before they were uprooted. Many objects were lost because the uprooting was accompanied by violence or was hurried due to the terror of war. But those who succeeded in taking a particular object with them and escaping with it, imbued it with sacred value. Only Grandmother Esther, for whom the doll provided therapeutic value as a child, the value of easing her loneliness, of a transition object that she could cling onto in the new land, could impart the doll with a sacred value and pass on the feeling to her granddaughter – the sense of what had been and no longer exists and will never be again: Grandmother Esther’s lost childhood. The doll was irrelevant to the other preschoolers. For them, it was an embodiment of the material and not a memory-inducing object. In this sense, Monique Dolly is imparted with her own life. She lives in the shadow of the trauma from the previous century that turned so many people into refugees and emigres. The doll is a mirror, reflecting the memory of a destroyed world, a lost reality. Monique Dolly, who was uprooted from a different childhood world, suddenly appears from the previous century into our world, and brings with her warm childhood memories and a memory that refuses to be forgotten. Monique is a symbolic representation of mental processing of mourning and loss, connected with the Diaspora identity versus the Israeli one, the Mizrahi culture versus the native Israeli one, country of origin versus the birthplace of the Jewish birthplace, heritage, personal, familial, and historical memory. Grandmother Esther and Noga, each in their own way, style, and method, take Monique Dolly and imbue her with new and significant life. The doll has her own story. If she could talk, she would also tell her personal story, that bears witness to what the family went through during the Second World War (despite the fact that the Shoah is not mentioned explicitly in the story, but rather hinted at). Children naturally love stories, and Grandmother Esther, the narrator, creates the magic of the story theater (Sacerdoti, 2015). The narrator grandmother is the plot, the actors, the backdrop, and the music – one woman’s theater that gets the children’s imagination to work. In her story, Grandmother Esther opens a window in the hearts of the grandchildren, through which they can glimpse other people, another culture, another way of thinking, and another time period, that they continue. They will be exposed to the way in which earlier generations coped with the challenges they faced, and understand how the current generation copes with new and different challenges, such as immigration to Israel and the need to preserve the memories.

In the book, *Hasodot shel savtah* [Grandma’s secrets] (Friedman-Wirtheim, 2016), the grandson asks his grandmother:

I don’t understand [...] Why did you leave your home?/ And why did you not tell the police/ that there are such evil people/ who drove you out of your home/ and took your possessions?/ What kind of land was this, what kind of place?/ And why did no one write about it in the newspaper? (p.17)

The grandmother does not laugh or make fun of her grandson for his naive questions. She understands his viewpoint, thinks for a long time, and answers slowly and clearly while still comparing between “then” and “there” to “here” and “now”:

In those times we didn’t yet have a state,/ there was no army or police or any kind of protection./ We spoke the local language [...] but we didn’t learn or speak Hebrew [...] We had good lives, we didn’t want to leave [...] but the land where we lived wasn’t ours, / and we didn’t belong to it (p. 17).

The wooden horse who tells Grandma Bronia’s story in *Hibuk shel Ahavah* (A hug of love) is an empathetic narrator aware of his audience of receivers: he explains what needs explaining – “The Shoah [...] is another word for a disaster. A terrible disaster” (p. 5). He patiently answers every question he is asked. He smiles “an understanding smile” at the toys’ “innocent” questions and soothes them, “I’ll tell you everything in a minute” (6), and even reinforces what the toys say, and thereby encourages them to continue asking, “it’s such a shame there once were such cruel people!” said the blocks. “‘Right,’ said the wooden horse” (p. 21). The personal and harsh description of the grandparents’ experience in terse sentences, simple words, and honesty that is not shocking for the child, enables the transmission of the forcefulness of the experience at the child’s level and in line with his cognitive and emotional ability. In the toy corner,

while the wooden horse relates his story, the ball asks: “And what did the children do all day in the ghetto?” And the horse answers: “They didn’t let the children learn in the ghetto [...] they invented new games. For example, they tied rags together and turned them into a football” (Matzliah Liberman, 2015, p. 17).

The story *Kaleidoscope* by Hava Nissimov (Illustrations: Kinneret Gildar, Publisher: Tal May and Yediot Sefarim, 2015), is based on the true story of the life of Nissimov (who was called Eva as a child, and also in the story), who was given a kaleidoscope for her fifth birthday by her cousin, Adam. The kaleidoscope is only a cardboard tube, through which Eva looks at a flower on the window and the edges of the yellow patch on Adam’s coat, and also:

Pretty, green parks studded with flowers./ Children riding bicycles on the paths./ Like in the Krachinsky Park,/ the park where Mother and I sometimes took a walk./ On the tables, standing among the fruit trees,/ are plates with slices of bread and butter/ and even cakes and chocolate. (p. 43)

Five-year-old Eva is still unaware of what the yellow patch means, and therefore she sees the patch and the chocolate cake and the flowers and trees through the kaleidoscope as equally important from a visual or artistic viewpoint. The soft illustrations in yellow and black add to the Shoah atmosphere in the story – an atmosphere that Eva does not yet experience. Eva’s mother calls her to leave her kaleidoscope and go to her father’s store with her. The illustration on the way to her father’s store describes destruction of the Jewish stores, a barbed wire fence, and devastation:

Outside everything is grey:/ the sky, the sidewalks,/ the thin children with their torn clothing,/ grey people with bundles and suitcases,/ crowded, sad./ ‘Mommy, I’m cold.’/ Mother hurries me along. (p. 57)

The object, that should have brought Eva light and warmth, concentrating the broken sun’s rays inside it, is left at home, and now Eva is exposed to the miserable, cold reality outside. Eva is given another object at her father’s store: her father cuts her out a cardboard doll in his fabric store, because the doll store has closed. On the way home, children steal the squares of chocolate her father had given her for the way, and Eva again experiences the harsh reality outside her home, and begins to understand that there are children outside who are extremely poor. When Eva returns to her kaleidoscope, her perspective changes: “When it gets dark, the stars fall/ and cling to the fur of my animals./ Like they do to people’s coats”.

The device, the object, that was supposed to be a toy that would bring light and optimism and happy pictures to her room, becomes one that sharpens the reality: the stars are not bright, but rather yellow. The zebra looks like a prisoner in a striped uniform. Everything is sad and cold. Her mother takes her to her grandparents’ house, but their home is empty and there are objects thrown around all the rooms. At that moment, Eva understands that her grandfather and grandmother were taken away suddenly and will not return. Eva experiences the arbitrary and sudden loss of two beloved figures, but her father and mother whisper to each other and don’t really tell her what is happening: “There was a big secret walking around the rooms/ they didn’t tell me anything” (p. 84).

After Eva experiences the death of her father and loss of her other grandfather in quick succession, her mother tells her that now she needs to dress up as a new girl, who will live in a village, and she hangs a cross around her neck. The cross pendant is the third object Eva receives, an object that is supposed to help her survival. The first object given to her by her cousin, Adam – the kaleidoscope – was supposed to protect her, but the images in it changed. The second object, the cardboard doll, which her father gave her, was supposed to impart her with warmth and love, but it is not mentioned again in the story. The two objects “failed” in their goals. The third object, the cross, which her mother gives her, serves as a substitute for her Jewish identity, a substitute for her mother, who goes and does not say when she will return. Bronislava, the woman who hides Eva, and who Eva calls “Mother Bronislava”, does not let Eva look out of the window, and explains to her that she needs to hide. But so Eva won’t be sad, she tells her what she can see outside: a goat, a cow, chickens, a field of corn and colorful flowers. The images Eva saw through her kaleidoscope are now related through the eyes of Bronislava, who won’t allow Eva to go outside to play. After the war, Eva’s mother returns to take her, and they immigrate to Israel. Before their move, they throw away, according to her mother’s instructions, the kaleidoscope and her father’s photograph, because they have Polish writing on them. The kaleidoscope, that helped Eva organize the confused reality of her life, by journeying to an imaginary world and the multiple colored reflections that changed there, that served as a substitute for the dolls she did not have, and that helped her look differently at reality, that softened it for her and made her view it from a distance, that was a tool for healing, coloring the yellow and tragic reality in a different light, an anchor of stability for maintaining a sane routine, is now cast into the sea, and turns out to have been only a delusion. Eva obeys her mother and does not rebel, even though she has to give up her precious possessions. Throwing away the objects from the past is a kind of erasure of the past to welcome the anticipated future. In Israel, Eva is given the name Hava, and the final illustration in the book is one of an Israeli beach. The yellow, that ruled the entire book as a color identified with the Shoah, is now the color of the Israeli beach, but the illustration is circular as if it is from the lost kaleidoscope. Thus the two pictures of past and present merge into one, and the shreds of the memories cling to the new experience in the Land of Israel.

5. Summary

“Shoah literature for children relates human stories ‘in a camera flash’. Each individual story is a tiny part of a larger puzzle – the story of the Jewish nation” (Sacerdoti, 2015, p. 114). This article discusses five Hebrew Shoah books for children, with an object appearing in each one – a game or toy that is moved from one place to another, from one person to another, from one generation to the next, and creates a link between these toys and the story of the Shoah, that is a story of loss, even if the plot in the book of the story about the toy ends in survival and rescue. If we wish to have very young children participating in the story of the Shoah, so that they will be able to derive a value-based understanding, we require children’s literature that offers softness and cognitive and emotional appropriateness. These will take place through the poetic device of using an object or toy, close to the children’s heart. For those children, the books’ heroes – the toys and games – served as a kind of partition between the war and their leisure activities, in which they could play with and enjoy the toys and games they had received, prepared, or invented.

In the book, *The final reminder: How I emptied my parents’ house*, author Lydia Flem (2007) writes, “Objects live several times. After they are passed on to new owners, do they retain those who are traces of their previous existence? Imagining them in a different place, in other hands, for uses that are added to those they knew before, and do not leave them indifferent” (p. 101). “The objects also turn into orphans. They need adoptive parents, new friends, owners who will be exclusive and super-jealous, who will look after them well. The objects suffer when they are unused, abandoned, have no function.” “Grief work” through objects is also a “rite of passage, a metamorphosis [in which] the deceased takes his place within us [...] death belongs to life, life includes death” (p. 110).

Toys had a very strong emotional, social, and familial influence on the childhood of children during the Shoah. The children held onto their toys as an essential item for their existence, just like every other item that they required during that time, loved their toys very much and were emotionally connected with them even after the war ended. The games and toys were a means of encouragement, elevating and improving their mood. They succeeded in detaching the children from the reality in which they lived, and there were also cases in which the toys saved them from danger. The children clung to their toys and showered them with love and emotion, attributes that helped them survive the Shoah period, during which all their familial and social connections were based daily on loss and crisis. Toys and games accompanied the children and were made by them as an inseparable part of their humanity, even during the darkest times of human existence, whether their path led to redemption or to death.

In Meir Shalev’s book, *My Russian Grandmother and Her American Vacuum Cleaner: A Family Memoir* (2011), Grandma Tonia’s “hosting” is described, including her special attitude towards the objects in her home. In the simple home, almost bare of furnishings, the few items of furniture were imprisoned and wrapped in old shrouds:

No person reclined on them, no eyes beheld them other than those of Grandma Tonia, who entered there in order to “pass a rag” over them and ensure that none was dirty or had escaped. But once a year, in honor of the Seder night, the regular chairs were removed and brought to the dining room, which is how I was allowed to visit the holy of holies...

I remember that day quite clearly. I stood behind Grandma Tonia, curious and excited. She inserted the key and turned it, opened the door, and said, “You are permitted to enter, but do not touch anything.” (p. 17)

As opposed to that described in Meir Shalev’s book, in which the child could not access the objects in his grandmother’s home, in the works discussed in this article, the objects – the toys – were used by the children, served as part of shaping their character, and became a significant tapestry of their memories in adulthood. We have discovered the hidden codes of the transmission of the toys from one generation to the next, and the messages the objects gave to the children, the heroes of the texts. We have emphasized the visual language of the object, including the study of colors and shapes. The games displayed in the stories discussed in this article, are linked with a collective consciousness to the memory of the Shoah and express the inner world of the children, the heroes of the stories. Through the toys, we learned about their feelings, emotions, and values.

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Notes

Note 1. This article uses the word Shoah (Hebrew for catastrophe), to describe the event more commonly known as the Holocaust. This usage is preferred by many Jews since it identifies the event as a unique tragedy, as opposed to the term Holocaust which is now employed in many contexts.

Note 2. The figures are taken from the Yad Vashem website <https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/he/exhibitions/nochildsplay/intro.asp>

Note 3. *Bear and Fred: A World War II Story* in its English translation is forthcoming, by Amazon Crossing Kids, March 24, 2020.

Note 4. This is the English translation of the Hebrew, *Hamegirah hashlishit shel saba: Sipur lehorim, liyeladim, lesabim, ulesavtot*, published by Yediot Ahronot in 2003.

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